9

Understanding Age Stereotypes and Ageism

> **TOPICS COVERED IN THIS CHAPTER:**
>
> - Stereotypes association with older people
> - Age-related discrimination

As we learned in Chapter 1, America has a graying population. Presently, seniors (people age 65 and older) make up 13% of the population. By 2030, when the youngest members of the Baby Boomer generation reach retirement age, 19% of all Americans will be seniors (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The graying demographics of the U.S. population will focus more attention on issues facing older aged Americans. Research on **successful aging** is particularly applicable here: Successful aging is a concept that incorporates freedom from disease and disability, good cognitive and physical functioning, social connections, and productive activities. Data from large national surveys from 1998 to 2004 estimate that fewer than 12% of all older adults are aging successfully (McLaughlin, Connell, Heeringa, Li, & Roberts, 2010). This means that the large majority of older adults face challenges in their older years due to poor health, diminished cognitive ability, social isolation, and boredom. Even though age is one of the primary categories by which we organize our social world (see Chapter 2), the stereotyping and discrimination of older people has received only a fraction of the research attention that has been devoted to the understanding of race and gender-based prejudice. In this chapter, we explore how stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination of older adults undermine successful aging.

Old Age Categorization and Stereotyping

Recall from Chapter 2 that age (along with race and gender) is a primary social category, meaning that age-based social categorizations are automatic, or made too quickly (under 1 second) to be thoughtful and deliberate (Brewer & Lui, 1989). As with race and gender, we rely on physical cues for categorizing people based on age. What physical characteristics do you associate with older or elderly people? Wrinkled skin, gray or white hair, and posture and movement variables can all assist rapid identification of people based on their (old) age. The labels we give to these social categories vary but include old people, elders, seniors, senior citizens, and the elderly. Categorization of people into old age groups supports **ageism**, which refers to attitudes and beliefs, feelings, and behavior toward people based on their old age. We will consider each of these aspects of ageism in turn.

Early research found that there was not a *one-size-fits-all* stereotype of older people; rather, people held stereotypes of subgroups of older people (Brewer, Dull, & Lui, 1981). These subgroups, and the stereotypes associated with them, were first examined by Daniel Schmidt and Susan Boland (1986). They generated a pool of 99 adjectives and traits that were used in the study by asking people for terms they use when they think about older adults. These traits were then given to participants who were instructed to sort them into groups based on the traits they associated with particular kinds, or subgroups, of older people. Participants' trait sorting varied widely; some used as few as two subgroups, while others identified as many as 17 different types of older people. These trait sorts were analyzed via a hierarchical clustering procedure that identifies the best structure of nonoverlapping groups of traits. The analysis in this study found that stereotypes of older people had three levels—general traits, positive versus negative subgroups, and individual traits within each subgroup. At the most superordinate level were traits that described all old people, regardless of their subgroup. These included gray haired, hard of hearing, balding, and poor eyesight; indeed, the only nonphysical trait in the overall stereotype of old people was *retired*. Participants identified 12 subtypes of older people, eight were negatively valued and four were positively valued. Mary Lee Hummert and her colleagues (1994) replicated Schmidt and Boland's (1986) study with a more age-diverse sample of participants. They found that older-age participants had more, and more varied, stereotypes of the elderly, whereas younger participants had relatively simple stereotypes of the elderly. When the findings of the two studies are combined, seven common stereotypes of old people emerged. Table 9.1 displays the stereotypes and their traits.

When people evaluate a variety of out-groups along the fundamental dimensions used by the stereotype content model, older people consistently are grouped with disabled and developmentally disabled/retarded people. Thus, general stereotypes of old people reflect low levels of competence and high levels of warmth (Cuddy & Fiske, 2002). Whereas views of the elderly's competence are low but not extremely low, very few groups get higher warmth ratings than the elderly. Accordingly, stereotypes of the elderly contain more traits that reflect warmth than competence. Amy Cuddy and her colleagues (2005) tested the malleability of the old age stereotype; in other words, does

Table 9.1 Representative Traits in the Stereotypes of Subgroups of Older People

Subgroup	Traits
Despondent	neglected, sad, afraid, lonely
Severely impaired	feeble, slow thinking, senile
Shrew/curmudgeon	ill-tempered, complaining, prejudiced, stubborn, nosy
Recluse	quiet, timid, live in past, set in ways
John Wayne conservative	proud, patriotic, wealthy, conservative, religious
Perfect grandparent	kind, generous, family oriented, wise
Golden Ager	intelligent, productive, healthy, independent

SOURCES:

Schmidt, D. F., & Boland, S. M. (1986). Structure of perceptions of older adults: Evidence for multiple stereotypes. *Psychology and Aging, 1*(3), 255–260.

Hummert, M., Garstka, T., Shaner, J., & Strahm, S. (1994). Stereotypes of the elderly held by young, middle-aged, and elderly adults. *Journal of Gerontology: Psychological Sciences, 49*, 240–249.

the *warm and incompetent* change if older people disconfirm the stereotype in some way? They had participants read a description of an elderly adult that incorporated the warm traits in the elderly stereotype. The description then included further material that manipulated the competence of the person: Participants (randomly determined) read either about the person's poor or excellent memory. After this exercise, participants rated the person on warmth and competence dimensions. Elderly targets who were described as low in competence were given higher warmth ratings compared with the highly competent (and a no competence information control) target. Interestingly, the competence manipulation did not change participants' ratings of the elderly target's competence. When the elderly target behaved in a stereotype-consistent manner (by being less competent than expected), participants rewarded the elderly person with higher warmth ratings. Cuddy et al. (2005) concluded that the positive dimension of the old age stereotype is malleable (old people can be more or less warm) but the negative dimension resists change (old people are always incompetent).

In an important review, Richard Posthuma and Michael Campion (2009) studied stereotypes of older people in the workplace by synthesizing findings from over 100 studies of age-related stereotyping at work. Based on their analysis, stereotypes of older workers have three strong themes. First, they are perceived as less motivated and competent at work. This meshes with the stereotype content model's conclusions—that older people are viewed as warm but not very competent—but in fact, there is little evidence that work performance declines with age (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). Some studies even show that, relative to younger people, older people are more productive at

their jobs. Second, numerous studies show that older employees are also viewed as harder to train or retrain and are thus inherently less valuable as employees. This stereotypic assumption may reflect the low-competence stereotype but also reveals assumptions of older employees' inability to change, their likely shorter tenure with the company, and less potential for development. Third, older workers are perceived as more expensive employees because they have higher salaries and, due to declining health, use more health care benefits. This piece of the stereotype reflects the widespread, though exaggerated, assumption that old age and illness are correlated (Ruppel, Jenkins, Griffin, & Kizer, 2010). Although it would appear that stereotypes of older workers are uniformly negative, Postuma and Campion also found a lot of research evidence that older employees, compared with their younger-age counterparts, are viewed as more trustworthy, stable, sociable, and dependable. These perceptions reflect a warmer and more positive aspect of stereotypes of older workers. Another review of the research supports these conclusions. Anne Bal and her colleagues (2011) summarized studies on perceptions of older workers and found that older workers are viewed as less worthy of advancement and less interpersonally skilled but more reliable, compared to younger workers.

Another way to look at old age stereotypes is to examine how older people are perceived in various life domains they include, and that is what Anna Kornadt and Klaus Rothermund (2011) did. Their large-sample survey found that stereotypes of older people are clustered into eight independent domains, including physical and mental fitness, leisure activities, religion and spirituality, and work and employment. The most negative stereotypes were in three particular domains: friends and acquaintances, financial and money-related issues, and physical and mental fitness. Stereotypes were the most positive in the religion and spirituality domain. These findings show again the ambivalence of old age stereotypes: We hold very negative and positive attitudes toward older adults depending on the life domain being considered.

Finally, some research shows that old age stereotypes are just as prevalent in older as they are in younger adults. People tend to attribute memory lapses and other *senior moments* in older people to stable, dispositional causes, whereas the same behaviors in younger people are attributed to more changeable causes, (Erber, Szuchman, & Rothberg, 1990). Most notably, this attribution bias occurs in older, as well as younger, people. Mary Lee Hummert and her colleagues (2002) measured both implicit and explicit ageism in younger (average age = 22 years) and older (average age = 80 years) participants. Implicit ageism was measured with the Age Implicit Association Test (Age-IAT), in which participants responded as quickly as possible to positively and negatively valued traits that were paired with the words *old* and *young*. Explicit ageism was measured by having participants identify their attitudes toward older people on a thermometer where 0° and 99° represented cold and warm feelings, respectively. All participants, regardless of their age, showed implicit ageism, but negative age-related attitudes were notably higher among the older, compared with the younger, participants. Explicit attitudes among the old participants revealed bias in favor of younger people and bias against older people.

Interestingly, this proyoung/antiold bias was not observed among young participants. Elderly people who hold stereotypical views about their own-age peers seem to be stereotyping themselves. We know from Chapter 2 that stereotypes have the power to shape people's identity and behavior in stereotype-consistent ways. We will consider, a bit later in this chapter, if old age stereotypes are self-fulfilling.

Old age stereotypes are expressed in the representations and portrayals of older adults on television. Unlike the real world, the social world of television is not very age diverse. Although about 12% of the U.S. population is 65 years or older, only 2% of the TV characters are in that age group (Gerbner & Ozyegin, 1997). Jake Harwood (1995) counted the older (defined as age 60+) main and supporting characters on 40 of the most-watched TV programs in 1995. Out of a total of 490 characters, only 29 (or 6%) were older adults. He also found no older lead characters and very few older supporting characters in the most popular shows watched by children and young adults. These figures show that older adults are underrepresented on TV, especially on programs aimed at younger viewers.

In general, older characters are portrayed in negative and stereotypical terms—as dependent, lonely, disagreeable people who have various physical and mental limitations (Bishop & Krause, 1984; Gerbner, Gross, Signorielli, & Morgan, 1980; Montepare & Zebrowitz, 2002). Older characters are more than twice as likely to be shown with some disability—such as an illness, injury, or significant maladjustment—than are younger characters. And, compounding the gender discrimination on TV that was discussed previously, older women are more likely to be portrayed as *disabled* than are older men (Dail, 1988; Gerbner, 1997). However, not all types of programming have such an age bias. Older adults are more visible and positively portrayed on daytime serials (i.e., soap operas) than in prime-time shows (Cassata, Anderson, & Skill, 1980). Also, there are benevolent images of older people in TV advertisements in which older characters are seen as advisors, doting grandparents, high-income investors, and active retirees (Miller, Leyell, & Mazachek, 2004). In other words, we see the ambivalence of old age stereotypes on television too: Older people have a lot of negative, but some positive, qualities.

Two of the examples of older characters who are regular cast members on prime-time TV shows are on *The Simpsons,* a critically-acclaimed, prime-time animated comedy about a dysfunctional but endearing family of five and one of the longest-running shows in U.S. television history. Abe Simpson is the nursing home-bound father of Homer; he is typically portrayed as a senile and dependent individual who is a burdensome figure in his son's life. Mr. Burns (Homer's boss) is cast as a disagreeable, spiteful, miserly, and manipulative old man. *The Simpsons* cast of characters is age diverse, in a way that is roughly proportionate to the real world, but the older characters are portrayed in negative stereotypical terms.

Children are also underrepresented on TV, a surprising finding given that Saturday morning—and on some cable channels, all day every day—is devoted largely to children's programming. These shows, however, typically feature animal, puppet, cartoon, or adult characters. Thus programming designed for children portrays an

odd cast of characters that largely excludes real children. Despite comprising about 19% of the U.S. population, children (ages 0 to 10) make up only 6% of the TV cast of characters. Adolescents are similarly underrepresented on TV, making up 10% of the real-world population but just 5% of the TV population (Gerbner, 1997). In summary, the television world is vastly less age diverse than the world in which we live. Senior citizens and youth are underrepresented on TV and, when they appear, have less important roles. Older adults, particularly older women characters, are portrayed in negative and stereotypical terms. These representations send an implicit message, especially to heavy TV viewers, that the *important* people in our world are men and women in the prime of life.

Old Age Prejudice

In addition to stereotypic attitudes and beliefs about older people, ageism also involves emotional reactions to the elderly. It is no surprise that prejudicial reactions to old people mirror the ambivalent stereotypes held about them. Susan Fiske and her colleagues (2002) found that pity was the most common emotion felt about the elderly; indeed, few groups prompt as much pity as the elderly. Pity is a typical response to people who, through no fault of their own, face difficult or diminished life circumstances. And indeed, the pity and sympathy we feel toward the elderly acknowledges difficulties such as declining health and loss of opportunities that plague elderly people but that are not seen as responsible for. In addition to being pitied, older people in general also prompt admiration in perceivers (Fiske et al., 2002). Of the subgroups of stereotyped older people in Table 9.1, which ones prompt pity and which ones prompt admiration? We admire older people particularly when we perceive that they have lived life on their own terms and achieved a sort of longitudinal form of success—having *done something* with their lives.

Old people also prompt a range of negative feelings in others, and chief among those is anxiety. Researchers have found that anxiety is a common response to older people among the young, and the main reasons seem to be that old people remind us what may, or likely will, happen to all of us eventually (Greenberg, Schimel, & Martens, 2002). The elderly remind us that youth and beauty will fade; that illness and disability, along with the social isolation they can cause, are likely; and that death is a certainty for everyone. As we learned in Chapter 4, anxiety and prejudice are closely linked, and much research in the terror management tradition shows that existential anxiety motivates all manner of prejudice. Researchers measured contact with, anxiety about, and behavior toward the elderly in a sample of students (Bousfield & Hutchison, 2010). They found that the more anxiety participants had, the less contact they had with older people. In addition, anxiety about older people predicted attitudes and behavior: Participants who reported more anxiety also attributed more negative characteristics to older people and reported less willingness to help the elderly. This study highlights the spiraling nature of ageism: Anxiety leads to avoidance and more stereotyping of the elderly, which in turn produces more ignorance and negative emotions.

Another explanation for the anxiety and threat posed by the elderly to younger people trades on the stereotypic beliefs that old people are sick and feeble and therefore more likely to catch and carry illnesses that can be caught by others (Bugental & Hehman, 2007). Indeed, anxiety and the fear of infection has been observed in response to people from groups (e.g., the obese) whose physical qualities are not even remotely related to illness let alone contagiousness (Park, Schaller, & Crandall, 2007). To test the relationship between concern with illness and ageism, Lesley Duncan and Mark Schaller (2009) measured participants' perceived vulnerability to disease and then exposed them to a slide show that raised the salience of germs (or, in the control condition, accidents) in the environment. Ageism was measured with the Age-IAT, a test of implicit prejudice mentioned frequently in past chapters. When participants were reminded that germs are ever present in the environment, their agist attitudes increased. And, consistent with the reasoning above, the greatest prejudice was observed in those participants who felt vulnerable to infectious illness.

Are Old Age Stereotypes Self-Fulfilling Prophecies?

We know from previous chapters that stereotypes can generate their own fulfillment. That is, under certain conditions stereotypes of students' ability, for example, undermine their academic performance and lead to the very outcome that was assumed by the stereotype. Do old age stereotypes shape the behavior of older people? To find out, Brad Meisner (2010) conducted a meta-analysis of studies that manipulated age stereotypes and measured behavior in older-age samples. In this sort of study, older participants typically were randomly assigned either to a set of old-age stereotypic stimuli (e.g., images or words) or control stimuli, followed by a measure of some behavior. In some studies, the stimuli reflected positive aspects of the old-age stereotype, whereas other studies had negative old-age stimuli. Typical dependent measures included memory tests, walking speed and other physical tests, and self-perceptions of age-stereotypic dimensions. Two important findings emerged from this quantitative review. First, both types of stereotypic content had self-fulfilling properties: Negative age-stereotypic stimuli produced negative effects on participants' behavior, and positive stimuli produced positive effects. Second, the impact of negative stimuli on behavior was much larger than the effect of positive age stereotypic stimuli. So, although the old age stereotype is a mix of positive (e.g., warm) and negative (e.g., incompetent) traits, negative traits have more power to shape elderly persons' behavior and self-concepts in stereotype-consistent ways.

How do negative old-age stereotypes become self-fulfilling? Richard Eibach and his colleagues (2010) suggest that feeling old helps explain how negative stereotypes get internalized by older people and change their behavior. In one study, older participants (average age = 55 years) read paper material that was arranged to be difficult to read (e.g., small type, low contrast) or easier to read. One half (randomly determined) of the participants were given an explanation for the lack of clarity (a photocopying problem); the others received no explanation. The dependent measure in the

study was subjective age (How old do you feel?). Participants who did not have an explanation for their difficulty reading the material self-stereotyped and reported feeling almost 10 years older than the participants who had an explanation for the reading problem. In a second study, they found that older participants self-stereotyped in the *no explanation* condition but only after hearing negative, but not positive, age-stereotypic material.

Other researchers found that older people were particularly vulnerable to the threat imposed by negative age-related stereotypes if they were more educated (Hess, Hinson, & Hodges, 2009). In that work, older participants took a memory test that was described in one of two ways: as able to assess the impact of aging on memory (threat condition) or having had the age bias removed from the test (no threat). Participants who felt threatened by the old-age stereotype and who were the most educated did the worst. Hess and his colleagues argue that better educated senior citizens identify with their group membership more and therefore are more vulnerable to internalizing stereotypes about their group. In addition to greater affiliation with their in-group— older people—seniors with more education are also more likely to participate in groups and organizations such as senior citizens' interest groups, defined for the older adult demographic. According to Becca Levy's (2003) analysis, the more connections older adults have with these groups, the more they self-identify as old, become the target of old-age stereotypes, and internalize those stereotypes. Levy (2009) notes that unlike members of other negatively stereotyped groups (e.g., racial minorities, women, gay and lesbian individuals) who have the opportunity to gradually develop coping strategies throughout their lives, older adults don't become *old* until they reach a threshold defined by the broader culture (e.g., age 65, or retirement). As a result, they acquire their membership in a negatively stereotyped group rather abruptly and are not prepared to handle the negative stereotypes they suddenly face as members of that group. Moreover, the newly *old* bring with them the accumulation of negative attitudes and feelings toward the old they passively acquired throughout their lives. As new members of the group they stereotyped when they were younger, those stereotypes now apply to themselves, making self-stereotyping difficult to resist.

Discrimination of Older Workers

The Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), passed by the U.S. Congress in 1967, made age-based employment discrimination illegal. The ADEA was responding to engrained policies that reflected old-age stereotypes—older workers were assumed to have diminishing mental competence and physical ability—that led to discrimination of older workers. Prior to ADEA, many companies had mandatory retirement ages that pushed older workers into unemployment regardless of their ability to continue doing their jobs. These displaced older workers could spend years in unemployment, creating a class of discouraged workers with eroding skills. Also, people were living longer and healthier lives and thus were able to be productive past the arbitrary

retirement ages of their employers. Although the ADEA has achieved successes, including eliminating mandatory retirement ages, there is plenty of evidence that age-based discrimination in the workplace persists. We review some of that evidence here.

The past several years, beginning with the collapse of the banking and financial sector in 2008, have seen massive layoffs of workers and the movement of American jobs to foreign labor markets. According to Vincent Roscigno (2010), who summarized the effects of this period on older workers, tenure (the amount of time a worker is employed at a company) has declined steadily for older workers. Indeed, annual displacement rates of workers age 55 and over have been the highest of all age groups since 2001. According to Roscigno (2010), layoffs of older workers are often preceded by a period of harassment, in which older workers are asked to take on more responsibilities or do tasks that younger employees are not asked to do. The workers' refusal, or legitimate inability, to perform such duties can be used to justify their dismissal. In this way, age-based discrimination is legitimized and rationalized, making it difficult to challenge in court. Nevertheless, the last few years have seen a rapid increase in the number of age discrimination suits filed under ADEA (Macnicol, 2006). Roscigno and his colleagues (2007) studied the wage loss and hardships associated with being laid off among older workers and found that termination of older workers just prior to crucial dates regarding their pension, when the company would be obligated to pay the full pension, was common. Many of these layoffs are engineered by citing *infractions*, or the refusal to perform particular (unreasonable) duties, as mentioned earlier. When older workers are pushed out of their jobs, in addition to the economic hardships they must deal with, they also face age discrimination in hiring practices. Because older workers are stereotyped as being resistant to change, difficult to train, and having physical limitations, younger workers (despite their inexperience) are given preference in hiring new workers. As a result, older workers take more temporary and part-time jobs to make ends meet than displaced younger workers. Additionally, older compared with younger job seekers spend much longer looking for work and respond to many more ads in order to get an interview than younger people (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). And finally, older workers who experience forced displacement from their jobs are cut off from a network of workplace friends, colleagues, and coworkers that feels very much like a family and provides major social support resources.

As we stated earlier, the disproportionate layoffs of older workers, who are still productive and interested in working, mean that older workers attempt to reenter a job market that is already age biased. Numerous studies have been done that present participants acting as employers, or actual employers, with identical employment qualifications and materials of hypothetical job applicants that differ only in age and measure their willingness to hire the applicant. Frederick Morgeson and his colleagues (2008) reviewed these studies and made several conclusions. First, studies that have been done in laboratory settings (usually with college student participants) consistently find evidence of age discrimination: Participants evaluate younger, compared with older, applicants more positively even when they are equivalent in all other respects. Second, some of these studies also find that the evaluations of the applicant depend on the type of job

they are applying for, such that older applicants may be discriminated against for *younger* jobs such as those in the fast food industry. Also, discrimination of older workers has been found to be mediated by the hirer's competence-related old age stereotypes (Krings, Sczesny, & Kluge, 2011). This shows the interdependence of stereotyping and discrimination: Well learned or situationally activated old-age stereotypes can produce discriminatory behaviors that might not have occurred in the absence of those stereotypes. The strength of laboratory studies (control over extraneous variables) is also their greatest weakness. Laboratory investigations of hiring scenarios lack ecological validity, meaning that the findings from these studies may not describe what happens in real-life interviews. For that reason, Morgeson, et al. (2008) also summarized hiring studies that were done in real employment settings, with store managers and other personnel professionals as participants. Some, but not all, of these studies reveal a bias against older workers. The presence of age discrimination in these studies depended on other variables, such as the type of job being interviewed for and the sex of the interviewer. However, some of those studies also found that older workers were viewed more favorably than younger workers on particular measures. Morgeson et al. (2008) concluded that factors like qualifications and past experience were much more determinant of hiring decisions than age.

Summary

Stereotypes of senior citizens and the elderly contain a mix of positive (warm, trustworthy) and negative (incompetent, feeble) traits, although negative traits tend to dominate the stereotype. Negative stereotypical subtypes of older people (e.g., the curmudgeon, the recluse) also outnumber positive subtypes (e.g., the perfect grandparent). The fundamental ambivalence that underlies our beliefs about older people is reflected in prejudicial reactions and discriminatory behavior in that old people prompt both pity and anxiety in us. In the workplace, older workers are also seen as more trustworthy and reliable than younger workers, but are discriminated against for their presumed declining mental and physical vitality. The aging of the American population should focus researchers' efforts to better understand ageism.

DI | Diversity Issue 9.1: Elderspeak

Do you talk differently to your elderly grandparent than to your friends? Communication with older adults is not only louder and slower, it is also less understandable and is perceived by older adults as patronizing (Ryan, Bourhis, & Knops, 1991). Presumably, this pattern of communication reflects stereotypic beliefs of the elderly as hard of hearing or dim-witted. According to Ruscher (2001), we tend to patronize, or talk down to, outgroup members whom we believe are less intelligent than us. Older adults are the most common target of patronizing speech, called **elderspeak**. Elderspeak features more basic vocabulary and simpler structure, a slower speech rate, and more pitch variations than typical conversational speech (Kemper, 1994; Ruscher, 2001). Participants in one study

prepared to interview either an elderly or a middle-aged adult (Rodin & Langer, 1980). The participants who prepared for the elderly, compared with the middle-aged, interviewee chose questions from a master list that were simple and easy to answer, even when the interviewee was characterized as intellectually competent. In other words, the (intended) communication of the interviewer was guided by his or her stereotypic beliefs that old people, as a group, have diminished intellectual capacities. Much other research shows that people speak more slowly, repetitively, and simply to elderly people (Kemper, 1994; Rubin & Brown, 1975).

Does elderspeak have effects on the senior citizens with whom we interact? Monica Harris and her colleagues (1994) had subjects teach a lesson either to an elderly person or another student. Those teaching the elderly, compared with the college-aged, student were less friendly and more nervous and, among female teachers, taught less material. Later, other students watched the videotaped teaching session (without being told what condition the teacher was in) and took a test on the lesson material. The students who watched the elderly teachers scored worse on the test than those who watched the college-student teachers, even when the lesser amount of material taught in the lesson was accounted for. This study provides only indirect evidence of the negative effect of elderspeak because the responses of elderly individuals themselves were not measured. Still, if college students do more poorly when taught in *elderspeak*, we should expect similar underperformance among elderly people. Other research finds that elderspeak is perceived by elderly people as offensive and leads them to feel inadequate about their communication skills (Caporael, Lukaszewski, & Culbertson, 1983; Kemper, Othick, Gerhing, Gubarchuk, & Billington, 1998). However, elderspeak may not be experienced by older people as uniformly negative; depending on who is doing the speaking it may convey warmth or superiority (O'Connor & St. Pierre, 2004). Nevertheless, when nursing home staff were trained to avoid elderspeak with elderly residents, their communications were rated by the residents as more respectful and less controlling compared to the pretraining communications (Williams, Kemper, & Hummert, 2003).

In summary, elderspeak tends to be experienced negatively, especially by higher-functioning elderly people. The effects of being spoken to with obviously simpler and more deliberate speech may make older people acutely aware that they are viewed in negative stereotypic terms. This awareness, in members of other stereotyped groups, such as Blacks and women, has negative effects on both self-evaluations and behavior and makes them vulnerable to confirming the stereotype.

DI Diversity Issue 9.2: Retirement

For most of history, people worked until they were physically unable to work; there was no such thing as **retirement**. For much of the last century, however, pension plans, Social Security, and other worker provisions allowed workers to leave employment and begin a new stage of life called retirement that was not defined by one's relationship

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to a company or professional identity. Researchers found that people who identified strongly with their professional roles both delayed retirement and had more difficult transition and adjustment to retirement (Adams & Beehr, 1998; Quick & Moen, 1998). Up until the ADEA legislation discussed earlier, workers faced mandatory retirement ages. Today, most workers are free to work, again, as long as their physical and mental abilities allow them to. So, what does it mean to be retired, and how has the concept of retirement changed?

Kenneth Schulz and Mo Wang (2011) have observed that retirement can take one of three forms: a decision-making process, an adjustment process, or a career-development process. In the first, workers actively disengage from work on their own schedule and put work-related identities permanently aside, while focusing on their connections to family, interests, and community activities. In this model, retirement is defined by the decision to retire, and it is a major, and often stressful, life event. In the second form, retirement is defined not by a decision to retire but by one's transition from work and adjustment to retirement. Retirement, then, is the process of adjusting to a life in which work and work identities no longer apply. This model is illustrated by those who use retirement to try new activities and identities, travel, or develop new skills. These sorts of retirees may not call themselves retired—for them, the focus is on the adjustment process rather than the status. The third form of retirement views it as a career change process rather than a career exit. For many, retirement is a new stage of a continuing career, with new professional challenges and growth. In this model, retired workers try to redesign their work lives to accommodate the greater freedom and leisure time they have in retirement. Workers who retire, only to find new challenges as writers, teachers, or consultants, reflect this understanding of retirement.

This decision-making model most characterized retirement for much of the last century, when most people worked their whole careers with the same one or two companies and generally chose when to retire. Economic recessions and large scale layoffs and downsizing in the past 10 years forced a new model of retirement—an adjustment process—on a whole generation of workers. In contrast with their parents, many of those workers were not ready to retire and did not decide to retire. Finally, many workers now use retirement (whether planned or forced) to strategically acquire new skills or get more education with the goal of transitioning to a new career.

?
• Which model best describes your father or mother's (or grandparent's) retirement?
• Explain how these different models of retirement depend on one's individual goals and values.

KEY TERMS

Successful aging   175

Ageism   176

Elderspeak   184

Retirement   185

FOR FURTHER READING

Karel, M. J., Gatz, M., & Smyer, M. A. (2011). Aging and mental health in the decade ahead: What psychologists need to know. *American Psychologist*. Advance online publication. doi: 10.1037/a0025393

This article examines the consequences of the aging Baby Boomer generation for mental health and health care policy.

Online Resources

U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)
http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/adea.cfm

This section of the EEOC website presents information about the ADEA. Go to the Prohibited Practices page to see what forms of age-based discrimination are illegal under ADEA.

National Center for Victims of Crime
http://www.ncvc.org/ncvc/Main.aspx

Go to Resource Library, Statistics, and then Elder Victimization to see a lot of data and facts on how older people are victims of crime.

National Center on Elder Abuse
http://www.ncea.aoa.gov/ncearoot/Main_Site/index.aspx

Go to FAQ / Basics for information on types of elder abuse, risk factors, and typical abusers of elders.